

Declassified
Authority: 43265 By:
Brewer Thompson
Date: 05-06-2015

(11)

CHARGE
ALDE
MINECON
USIS
ECON
E/COML
POL/R
POL-2
SCI
MILGP-2
DAO-3
DEAN
INR/CS/BR
INR/RAR/LA
ARA/LA/BR
BRASILIA ✓
BELEM
P ALEGRE
RECIFE
S PAULO
SALVADOR
CF

Amembassy RIO DE JANEIRO

INFO : BRASILIA, SAO PAULO

SEP 3 23 AM '70
AMERICAN EMBASSY
BRASILIA, BRAZIL

A-1

POL 15-7
ACTION COPY

ACTION TAKEN

Amconsul RECIFE

August 5, 1970

Possible Debate Between Dom Hélder and Minister of Education

(BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED)

1. The following comment on the possibility of a debate between Dom Hélder Câmara, Archbishop of Olinda and Recife, and Minister of Education Jarbas PASSARINHO appeared in Dom Hélder's Boletim Arquidiocesano, No. 103, dated August 2, 1970:

2. (Unofficial translation) "D. HELDER AND TV TUPI - The 'Journal of Brazil' of July 27, 1970, page 4, section one, stated that the Minister of Education, Mr. Jarbas Passarinho, 'immediately after a television debate with the bishop Dom José Maria Pires, accepted the invitation to renew the debate with Dom Hélder Câmara'; adding that this did not take place due to the Archbishop of Olinda and Recife's failure to participate. The Journal of Brazil continues: 'Reading now the interview of Dom Hélder with l'Express, the Minister of Education must have thought that the Archbishop lost an opportunity to say what he thinks of the Brazilian Government on television in an open debate in which he could speak and hear objections. The opportunity, nevertheless, is not yet lost. A special license (italics by Boletim) could be obtained for a television program in which Dom Hélder could discuss with the Minister of Education the problems that cause him pain.'

3. "A few days ago Dom Hélder received a telephone call from TV-Tupi informing him that the official censorship will authorize two programs with the Archbishop of Olinda and Recife: one for a debate with Minister Jarbas Passarinho and the other for a direct interview

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
GROUP 3

POL:WJL:Jr:ibs
POL:VHB:BlockerIII

CG/NEAD:DL:lion

Contributor: Donor M. Lion, CG/NEAD

Clearance: Amembassy RIO:REJohnson

with the TV. Dom Helder requested that the message be sent in writing, with the possible circumstances regarding the two programs, with the understanding that he would respond and indicate his indispensable conditions for the acceptance of these programs. We can predict that these will include, among others, the following demands: a live program, unprepared and spontaneous questions and answers (pergunta no ar, resposta no ar), adequate time for answers, prior knowledge of all the subject matter of the proposed debate. The fact that the other debate did not take place was not because it was avoided, but because the Archbishop was unable to participate due to prior commitments."

(BEGIN CONFIDENTIAL)

4. COMMENT: Since Dom Helder does not have access to the Brazilian media, the Boletim article is clearly his only method of rebutting insinuations that he fears to meet Passarinho in debate. (The Boletim has a circulation of 600. It is mailed to all priests in the diocese, all bishops in Brazil and several major Brazilian newspapers including O Estado de São Paulo.) Although the Consulate General is aware of Passarinho's formidable reputation as a speaker and debater, it seems probable that Dom Helder's presumed reluctance to meet him is based more on suspicion that the ground rules would be rigged against him rather than fear of Passarinho. As seen from here, in any fair debate it is likely that the Government and Passarinho could only emerge as losers. Dom Helder's seemingly diffuse and poorly organized speaking style is more than compensated for by a quick and alert mind, an unexcelled dramatic ability, and great charismatic appeal. He would also be able to capitalize on the role of championing the cause of the underdog. A debate "on the problems of Brazil" would seem to play into Dom Helder's hands since, in spite of the impressive record of the revolutionary regime in many areas, examples of unresolved national problems, wide social-economic disparities and flagrant cases of social injustices are readily available to Dom Helder. In the opinion of the Consulate General, the solid, rational position which Passarinho could defend would be likely to arouse less response and support among many, if not most, of the viewers than the emotional (and in some instances just) points which Dom Helder has at his fingertips--rising unemployment has more bite than rising exports; stabilization of the national rate of inflation is not an emotional offset to many instances of declining rural real income and uncertain progress of real income among other sectors of Brazilian society; sound plans for promised expansion in education may not be as persuasive as the revolution's failure to fulfill its alleged promise of agrarian reform (one of Dom Helder's favorite arguments); Médici's position on the death squadron is not likely to score points against specific cases of murder gone unpunished, and alleged specific instances of torture. Passarinho is exceptionally good and even capable of what might be called demagoguery, but in any fair debate, he would probably have a losing hand.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

3

5. An additional consideration arguing against the wisdom, from the Government's point of view, of a Passarinho-Dom Helder debate is that, regardless of the results, following such a debate Dom Helder's personal immunity from Government punitive measures would be greatly increased.

LICV

Embassy RIO COMMENT:

The Embassy is divided on the hypothetical question whether, in the event such a debate were to take place, Passarinho's solid logic, sharpness, and ability to communicate would prevail over Dom Helder's charisma and dramatic ability as a champion of the underdog.

The Embassy is unable to obtain confirmation either from TV-Tupi or from military authorities in Rio of Dom Helder's statement contained in his monthly pastoral letter that he "... received a telephone call from TV-Tupi informing him that the official censorship will authorize two programs with the Archbishop...". It would be most surprising indeed if the Government of Brazil were to permit Dom Helder to appear on national television. By authorizing such appearances, the military would be providing Dom Helder with a national pulpit which he would be only too happy to use as a vehicle to attack the present administration. It is believed that President Medici has decided on a policy of not allowing the archbishop the opportunity to become a martyr in Brazil and overseas by arresting him or bringing him to trial while at the same time trying to insure that his views will not gain wide dissemination within the country.

EO50x1